Consuming Hello Kitty: Saccharide Cuteness in Japanese Society

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April 22, 2016

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Submitted to The Wellesley College Japanese Language and Culture Department in partial fulfillment of the Honors requirements

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I thank Professor Eve Zimmerman not only for her guidance and encouragement throughout this thesis process, but also for her support during my time at Wellesley. I can always count on your warm personality to cheer me up. Without your constant feedback, motivation and advice this thesis would still be a vague idea left in the streets of Harajuku.

To Professor Maeno and Professor Torii, for always encouraging me to continue my study of the Japanese language. Your dedication and passion for teaching helped me push through the daily struggles I experienced learning Japanese.

To Professor Goree, your positive energy and support has helped build my confidence as a writer. Your classes have inspired me to leave my comfort zone and develop myself and my writing style.

To Professor Kodera, for always helping me feel optimistic about the future.

I owe a great thanks to the Pamela Daniels Fellowship Committee, as well as Pamela Daniels for providing me with a generous grant that allowed me to conduct fieldwork in Harajuku.

To my family, for their unending love and support.

To Eric, for always supporting me and encouraging me to follow my passions. I could never have completed this project without your unwavering support. I love you.

Introduction:

This project was inspired by an interest in Japanese culture and living abroad in Japan. As a young girl I was introduced to Japanese culture the same way many other non-Japanese people are: through the soft power of Japan's popular culture. My first encounter was the anime *Bishōjo Senshi Sērāmūn* (Beautiful Soldier Sailor Moon). I remember being captivated by the transformation sequence Sailor Moon underwent. During her transformation, Sailor Moon would shift from a normal girl, into a strong soldier who was protected by the power of the cosmos. She entered into a temporary cocoon of the fantastic where she shed her school girl outfit and donned the armor of a sailor soldier. In her fantastic cocoon, she twirled around in the air, ribbons wrapping around her body and her hair fluttering in the wind. Although the main character of this show, Sailor Moon was not alone, she had other female friends who also transformed into sailor soldiers. Each girl had their own cocoon, sharing the experience of the fantastic with one another. Together they wore their cute sailor soldier armor and battled evil.

Sailor Moon was the catalyst for my interest in Japanese culture and after my research in cute culture, I understand why I was drawn to the subject. Sailor Moon's transformation marks the moment where she enters a girls-only world, a place which is referred to by the literary scholar Honda Masuko as the *hirahira* (fluttering) world. Sailor Moon's ribbons and bows flow in the air, channeling her into another world. Her friends join her in this fantastic place for the girl where they too put on bows and ribbons. It wasn't until I studied abroad in Japan that I noticed the link between girls' culture and the usage of cute items such as ribbons and bows.

While studying abroad in Kyoto Japan, I noticed that many girls would carry around cute stuffed animals that were strapped to their school bags, or wear cute accessories in their hair. At Doshisha University, it wasn't an uncommon sight to see college girls using Disney character

stationary or wearing pigtails in their hair. In America girls tend to strive to appear older and sophisticated by detaching themselves from things that are linked to childhood. In Japan, girls would embrace these items of childhood nostalgia and proudly wear bows in their hair. In a society where all students wear a school uniform until high school, and in most cases wear a form of uniform in the work space, items such as stationary goods and hair accessories allow girls to have an individual identity while still remaining a part of a "girl community."

This thesis will explore the connection between girls' culture and how girls use cute objects to express themselves in Japan's patriarchal society. In Chapter 1, I will define cuteness and argue that girls use cute objects as vehicles to express a spectrum of emotions. The formula of cuteness lies in the object's proportions, color scheme and facial expression. The three main categories of cute that this chapter focuses on are, "sweet and cute," "scary and cute," and "pathetic and cute." Each troupe of cuteness projects a different expression for the consumer. To connect cuteness and femininity, the chapter will define the Japanese word *shōjo*, which translates to the demographic of girls that I research in thesis, as well as provide a behavioral case study in which researchers link usage of the Japanese word for cute, *kawaii*, and the development of female social roles.

To help further understand the connection between *kawaii* and the *shōjo*, I had the pleasure of interviewing seven young Japanese women about their relationship to cuteness. Their answers are woven into Chapter 1. Six of the seven girls I met in Kyoto while studying abroad and the seventh one is a YouTube video blogger who was nice enough to answer my questions about her cute lifestyle. I have provided translations of their answers as well as the original Japanese in the footnotes to the chapter.

Chapter 2 will explore Lolita fashion culture and argue that when girls dress in Lolita clothing they are choosing to become the cute object themselves in a form of a 'delicate rebellion.' In a collective society such as Japan, it is important to maintain group harmony by obeying the rules of social order. By dressing in Lolita fashion, girls are able to have a feeling of individuality while at the same time publicly displaying their dissatisfaction with society. Lolita fashion can be described as a style wherein girls dress up in clothing inspired by the Victorian era. Featuring excessive frills, lace and bows, Lolita fashion gives the wearer the appearance of an idealized aristocratic aesthetic. Lolita fashion is strongly inspired by the Rococo Era as well as the Lewis Carol novel, *Alice in Wonderland*. Just in the way that Alice has a "Wonderland," the girl too has a place of the fantastic to explore called Harajuku.

During wintersession 2016, I had the pleasure of going to Tokyo and living in Harajuku for a few weeks. I stayed in an apartment at the end of Takeshita Street (image to the right), ground zero for cute culture in Harajuku. Harajuku serves as an elaborate "Wonderland" that enables girls to exercise self-expression and enjoy girl culture without fear of being judged. Full of saturated cuteness, where everything caters to the girl, Harajuku is home to many Lolita clothing shops, sweets shops and accessory stores. Commodities sold in Harajuku are shaped in order to attract the girl consumer, and this gives girls important purchasing power.

Many girls look at Harajuku as a sanctuary of self-expression, by providing all the cute commodities one would need to express a wide range of emotions and individual statements. It is common for girls to congregate after school in Harajuku and change from their school uniforms into a more expressive set of clothing. To accommodate girls who want to transform after school, there is a store known as the Joy of Life Dream Station (JOL). At this store girls can change their clothes, and do their hair/makeup, all the while enjoying sweets that are sold in the food court attached to JOL. On the surface, Harajuku seems solely geared towards consumerism, but there are nevertheless spaces where one doesn't have to participate in commodity consumption. Harajuku is a large cocoon where girls can enjoy a common space and celebrate girls' culture.

The final chapter of this thesis will examine two contemporary narratives written by Japanese female authors, to investigate how Japanese women feel about their role in society. It is important to look at the literary imagination of female Japanese authors because narrative forms allow the author to openly communicate aspects of life which they otherwise might not convey openly. I have chosen to explore works from Yoshimoto Banana and Uchida Shungiku. Both of these authors use cute *shōjo* figures as their protagonists but what they express about their lives sit at polar opposites. Uchida uses a pathetic cute character to illustrate how the male gaze sexualizes girls' culture, whereas Yoshimoto chooses a scary cute protagonist and gives her agency against society. Both of these works reflect the importance of a safe space of expression for the girl. Once that space has been compromised, girls are unable to live within their cute world of the *hirahira*. For Uchida, living as a girl without being able to enter the *shōjoscape* proves to be pointless. The world of cuteness and the fantastic cocoon girls live in provide brightness and individual expression to their everyday life.

What I have discovered in the course of my research is that there is a spectrum of

cuteness that serves as a vehicle to soften the discontent young women feel about their place in Japanese society. People dismiss cute culture for lack of substance but it is a rich and multifaceted form of expression in contemporary Japan. I only wish that I could have worked in a Lolita dress shop and turned my thesis into a longer cross-cultural project.

Chapter 1: Cuteness is the "Mark" of the *Shōjo*

"Commodities are not just objects of economic exchange; they are goods to think with, goods to speak with."[1]
- Jon Fiske (1989:31)

1.1 Introduction

In the 1996 anime Revolutionary Girl Utena, Utena and her rose-bride Anthy, have a companion named Chu-chu. Chu-chu is a small, round, mouse-like animal that inhabits the girls' room. In this story, Chu-chu is the main cute object that both the girls consume within the privacy of the girls' world of their bedroom. Chu-chu behaves like a small child by stuffing cookies into its mouth and using an unintelligible language which consists exclusively of squeaks. With its rosy cheeks, child-like mannerisms and affinity for tea cakes, Chu-chu represents cuteness within the realm of the girl.

As the Chu-chu creature will demonstrate in this chapter, cuteness creates emotional bonds between girls and is used as an expression of individual personality. In order to better understand cute culture, I first did extensive academic research about cute culture and then went to the source: young Japanese women. When I spoke to young women about cute culture I found out that they all thought that cute culture can be enjoyed at any age, not only during childhood or adolescence. Every girl associated cute objects with positive attributes, using words such as happy (嬉しい), gentle (優しい), and warm (暖かい).The most surprising answer was to the question, "why do you like cute things?" to which 4 of the girls[2] answered that it was because cute items healed them (癒される).[3] They chose not to elaborate on what the cute objects healed

[1] Quote is used in the introduction of Christine R. Yano, *Pink Globalization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 1. Author of the quote is John Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 31.
[2] The other answers were なごむ (calms them down), 感覚的 (feelings), and happiness. All of these answers reinforce the idea that cute objects carry positive attributes and heal the girl who possesses them.
[3] 癒されるから - using the passive form shows that the viewer was healed by the object.

them from but whatever it may be, this response captures the healing element that cute objects have.

Sharon Kinsella and Honda Masako believe that Japanese girls use cute culture as a tool to create a community in which they can escape from the homogeneous patriarchal Japanese society. Cuteness is a non-threatening, passive vehicle that transports girls to a positive space outside the boundaries of Japanese society. They need this space because eventually in their youth, girls realize they will never be boys, and that their prospects for social mobility within the male-centric Japanese society are limited. This realization causes girls to shut themselves off to the world and create a “girls world" around them like a butterfly in a cocoon. A girl’s room is a personal place where, “she spins a small cocoon around herself wherein to slumber and dream as a pupa, consciously separating herself from the world outside.”[4] This fantastic cocoon is filled with bright, vibrant cute items that create an atmosphere of saccharide cuteness around the girl which she uses as her medium of expression. Cute items promote self-healing, allowing girls a space in which to heal.

(figure 1)

[4] Honda Masuko, “The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl,” in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20.

The youngest person that I interviewed was 19 year old Rikarin (figure 1). She is an up and coming Video Blogger who talks about her daily life as a Harajuku girl.[5] Her YouTube blogs are used to explain the *kawaii* lifestyle to an English speaking audience. Although she is Japanese, she speaks English in her videos. She believes that cute things have an atmosphere around them which makes them different from other objects. When asked about why she thinks cute objects are considered cute she said, "Because *kawaii* will make girls happy and more beautiful. And to make these changes, they should have some POWERS.[6] *Kawaii* things have those powers, so I think it has some special mood about them and that mood makes the things different from others."[7] Rikarin believes that cute objects do in fact, change the atmosphere around girls who consume them, giving them powers. These powers could be the ability of expression or simply an increase in self-confidence. Either way, cute objects provide a powerful means of expression for the girl.

Many theorists argue that cuteness focuses mainly on the relationship between mother (viewer) and baby (object). Although this holds true, there is another complex layer to the consumption of cuteness that is overlooked. Rather than dismissing cuteness as a vehicle of escapism, this chapter proposes that cuteness is a means of empowerment that strengthens the girl so she can pull away from the patriarchal society of Japan. Girls don cute armor that allows a reshaping of the atmosphere around them, transporting the wearer or owner into the fantastic world of the girl. Depending on the type of cute items a girl chooses to decorate her armor with, she can shift the atmosphere according to her feelings. As we will see, cuteness can take different forms, ranging from sweet cute to scary cute to pathetic cute.

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[5] She has a video blog collection with the YouTube channel Tokyo Fashion. Her blog series is titled, "My Harajuku Life."
[6] Rikarin capitalized this word in her email message.
[7] Rikarin, e-mail message, January 28, 2016.

1.2 What is Cute?

The Japanese word *kawaii*, can be translated into the English word cute, but due to etymological link with *kawaiiso* (pathetic or sympathetic), there is more of an emphasis on the vulnerable in the Japanese word. According to sociologist Sharon Kinsella, "cute essentially means childlike; it celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, simple, genuine, weak, and inexperienced social behaviors and physical appearance."[8] Essentially, cute is infantile and delicate, while also being pretty. Cuteness refers to an aesthetic response to the weak, something that creates an emotional attachment between the object and the viewer. Girls are able to reinforce positive feelings by consuming cute items.

There is a basic anatomy for what can be considered cute. The formula requires the item to be small, soft, infantile, mammalian, round, without bodily appendages, nonsexual, mute, insecure, helpless or bewildered.[9] The anatomy and definition of cute items provokes a protective response on the part of the viewer. Theorists attribute this to a phenomenon referred to as "Baby Schema," a term coined by ethnologist Konrad Lorenz. Baby Schema suggests that cute things take on the traits of babies. When girls look at cute items, they feel a maternal urge and begin to play a nurturing role.

In 2011, Adrian David Cheok and Owen Noel Newton Fernando conducted a series of experiments to look at cuteness in interactive systems hoping to find key perceptual elements which can be identified as cute. Their experiment tested texture, motion, color, sound, size and proportion, and shape and form. In all categories, the results reflected a strong relationship

[8] Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 1995), 220.
[9] Ibid., 222.

between cuteness and nature. When testing for texture, the results showed that as the texture becomes softer and has a longer pile, the cuteness rating increases.[10] A soft, long pile mimicked the tactile sensation of petting a kitten or puppy; infantile animals were universally considered cute. During the same experiment, findings showed that unnaturally long segments of pile were rated as "not cute." This low score could be a reaction to objects diverging from naturally occurring proportions. The researchers concluded that, "this feeling of obvious exaggerations and declining scores might provide lessons that show limits to the power of abstraction and manipulation from the real to the surreal."[11] The experiment for size and proportion reflected the idea of Baby Schema with respondents preferring proportions that are common to the size of a baby.[12]

I tested out this notion that cuteness is related to size and proportion in the young women I interviewed. The oldest young woman I interviewed was 26-year-old Ayana, who after working at the Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies for a few years, decided to go to America for graduate school. When asked if she has ever purchased a cute item online, she replied “No,” and emphasized that she cannot tell how large an item is by looking at it online.[13] She informed me that she does indeed buy cute objects, but only at brick and mortar locations. For many people including Ayana, cuteness is related to size. As an object gets smaller, the likelihood of it being considered cute increases.

The experiment Adrian David Cheok and Owen Noel Newton Fernando conducted for motion and sound, displayed a close association between cute things and infantile wildlife, much

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[10] Adrian David Cheok and Owen Noel Newton Fernando, “Kawaii/Cute Interactive Media.” *Art and Technology of Entertainment Computing and Communication*, no 22 (2011): 302.
[11] Ibid., 302.
[12] Ibid., 304.
[13] In January 21, 2016 e-mail interview with Ayana, her answer was:「オンラインではありません。大きさや実物がどんなものかわかりにくいからでしょうか」

like the textual test. When listening to an array of sound clips, the respondents preferred a higher pitch in melody because it is associated with cute baby animals.[14] To test for what can be considered "cute" movement, the researchers showed the subjects of the experiment a motion clip of a black dot moving in different directions at different speeds. The motion clip that was rated as most cute depicted a small black circle moving left to right with small hopping motions.[15] During open-ended feedback, many of the subjects responded that the circle moved like a baby animal, stumbling in awe and wonder, conveying a harmless expression.[16] The final category tested was shape and form. The findings showed that the respondents had a preference for roundness.[17] Too much shape is constricting and disables the malleability of the cute object.

If a cute object has a strongly defined shape, the viewer cannot manipulate it. As the experiment reflects, the viewer must be able to touch the small, cute, infantile object in order to experience the full effect of cuteness. When observing an object that has never been encountered before, the viewer uses prior knowledge to conjure up a previous experience and relate the two. For example, if the viewer sees a small rabbit hopping around he/she can assume the animal's fur would feel similar to that of a dog or cat, thus making the viewer desire to touch the cute object. As Sianne Ngai writes in *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, cute objects must allow the viewer to shape and deform them, so that the observer is able to project his/her emotions onto the object.[18] In the experiment described above, the respondents were able to project onto the experiments since none of the tests had facial features to illustrate emotions of their own.

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[14] Cheok and Newton, “Kawaii/Cute Interactive Media” 303.
[15] Ibid., 303.
[16] Fast and precise movements display power and aggression. These are commonly associated with hunting mannerisms.
[17] Ibid., 305.
[18] See Sianna Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 65.

Figure 2

1. 3 Sweet and Cute

A famous example of a cute object that allows the viewer to project onto it is Hello Kitty (figure 2). Her proportions are what Christine Yano refers to as an "anatomical disaster," due to Hello Kitty's severely disproportionate limbs. Although Hello Kitty does not have large eyes, her head to body ratio can be considered infantile. Her lack of a mouth strips away her ability to interact with the viewer, making her an emotional sponge. Hello Kitty's neutral expression prevents her from passing judgement. In *Pink Globalization* Christine Yano writes, "As a mirror the object is perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images, but desired ones... What is more, you can look at an object without it looking back at you."[19] There is a historical link between lack of facial expression of an object and identification for the viewer. Yano discusses the traditional Japanese style of artwork called, *hikimekagihana* (dashes for eyes, hooks for noses) and how these expressionless faces allow the viewer to identify themselves with the painting.[20] Hello Kitty's original pink bow and dress add a touch of femininity, making sure the observer knows that she is an obedient, dependent female. As Barbara Nemitz, author of the book *Pink* writes, the color pink "...may lead [the viewer] to conditions of intimacy, closeness, tenderness, peaceful contentment, happiness and a mild form of ecstasy."[21] By purchasing a Hello Kitty product, the consumer takes on the role of guardian. Hello Kitty in her cute weakness,

[19] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 20.
[20] Ibid., 21.
[21] See Barbara Nemitz, *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hetje Cantz, 2006), 45.

seduces the purchaser into "feeling that buying the product is, in fact, carrying out the wishes of the product itself."[22] By becoming the protector of Hello Kitty, the purchaser is assuming a role of mastery over the powerless object.

Many of the girls in my interviews described their favorite cute items in detail, but 24-year-old Kaya, went as far as to include a picture of her favorite cute item (figure 3).

(figure 3)

She described this as follows, "It's a cloth coaster that I bought at a general store. It is in the shape of a round, blue bird. It has lots of pink, red, yellow, and green embroidered thread in it."[23] Her attention to detail and decision to include a picture of her item accentuate the importance of the cute object to her. The keyboard in the background can also be used to show scale. When asked the question about carrying around cute objects, Kaya's answered that, "Usually, I don't think I carry around cute things that people can see. But, I probably carry cute things in my purse that people can't see."[24] Anthropologist Anne Allison phrased small items you can carry around

[22] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, 64.
[23] In January 22, 2016 e-mail interview with Kaya, her answer was:「雑貨屋さんで買った、布製のコースターです。まん丸の青い鳥の形をしていて、ピンク、赤、黄色、緑などの糸でお花の刺繍などがたくさん入っています」
[24] Ibid.,「たいてい見えるところには持っていないと思います。でも見えないところ（カバンの中）に持っているかもしれません」

as "pocket cuteness."[25] According to her, items that can be considered "pocket cute" are portable companions that transform any place into a world of fantastic play. By carrying around cute objects, girls can enter the world of the girl at any time. When Kaya was asked why she thinks cute objects are considered cute, she replied, "...those [cute] things make you feel that they are delicate and dependent on you, so you want to protect them."[26]

(figure 4)

1.4 Scary and Cute

In 2016, artist Takashi Murakami, had a pop-up cafe in Roppongi Hill's Hill's Cafe (figure 4). This cafe featured his happy smiling sunflowers (figure 6), reflecting excitement and happiness. The open mouths appear as if they're ready to have a conversation with the viewer, unlike Hello Kitty who is confined to a mouthless, muted expression. In the merchandise section

[25] For more information of "pocket cuteness" see Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
[26] Ibid., 「あったかい気持ちになります。また、時々そのものに繊細さや少し頼りなさも感じられて、こちらが守りたくなるからだと思います」

of the store, Murakami had stocked a different kind of cute object: DOB (figure 5). Murakami's scary cute objects such as DOB were tucked away, confined to the bottom shelf of a bookcase, out of sight for the viewer. The atmosphere of the cafe incited positive feelings, much like when someone views Hello Kitty. Creepy creations like DOB would shatter the sweet cute image and give the cafe the aura of deformed scary cuteness.

As shown by DOB, the cute spectrum includes aspects of creepy darkness, suggesting a range of emotions connected to cute. By consuming scary cute objects, girls can bare their fangs at society. Unlike the sweet and cute objects, scary cuteness grants girls the ability to be a bit aggressive, angry and wield agency. Females in Japanese society are taught to be demure and meek. Creepy cute objects act as a vehicle through which girls speak beyond the socially constructed limits given to them at birth.

Ngai believes that the cute object in "its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability is often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desire for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle."[27] The phrase that can easily describe what Ngai is saying is, "loving something to death." Luckily, most cute objects are soft and malleable, therefore, cuddling will not leave a permanent impact of the proportions of the object. When objects are deformed cute, which usually comes from a physically deforming of the cuteness, it no longer sends the same message of happiness and vulnerability. Figure 5 is an image of a Takashi Murakami sculpture of DOB, which displays the deformation of cuteness.

[27] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, 65.

(Figure 5)

(Figure 6)

DOB has the silhouette of a mouse but the lack of symmetry gives the viewer a feeling of uneasiness. The multiple mishmash of eyes makes it hard to tell where the object is looking. There appears to be two main eyes the viewer can focus on but with the pupils facing different directions, one cannot feel a connection to it. DOB is smiling, baring razor sharp teeth, blurring the lines between *kowaii* (scary) and *kawaii*. The deformed DOB displays that fact that "violence is always implicit in our relationship to the cute object while simultaneously making it more menacing to the observer."[28] Rather than being a figure of comfort and happiness, DOB is the product of sadistic mastery over what was once a cute concept. By consuming scary cute objects, girls feel mastery of their environment and express agency. These objects have already been manipulated so they are no longer sweet and innocent, allowing one to inflict anger and control over it. Sweet cute objects are able to absorb the love of girls, whereas scary cute objects act as a mirror displaying the darker, wicked side of girlhood. There is an emerging Japanese fashion called decora, in which girls will accessorize themselves with cute objects such as stitched up

[28] Ibid., 85.

teddy bears and products containing images of eyes.[29] These objects are considered “loud” and more aggressive than sweet objects such as teddy bears and dolls.

1. 5 Pathetic and Cute

(figure 7)

DOB is not the only object of this type. Kogepan (figure 7) is a burnt piece of toast; in Japanese *koge* is translated as scorched and *pan* means bread. If Hello Kitty is *kawaii*, and DOB is *kowaii* (scary) than Kogepan is *kawaiiso* (pitiful). With a bite taken out of his head, Kogepan reflects "the ultimate index of an object's cuteness... its edibility.”[30] San-X is known as an edgier version of Sanrio, the company that created the icon of cute, Hello Kitty. According to the San-X official Japanese website, of the fifteen character traits that Kogepan has most of them are all some form of depression, highlighting his gloomy (*kurai)* personality type.[31] His signature

[29] For more information on decora fashion see section 2.18: Queue Decora Fashion.
[30] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, 79.
[31] こげぱんのやさぐれ生活 (Kogepan’s aloof life), accessed February 13, 2016, http://www.san-x.co.jp/pan/kogegaku/

phrase is "you'll trash me sooner or later."[32] In "Commodifying Affection, Authority and Gender in the Everyday Object of Japan," Brian McVeigh explains that:

> "*akarui* [bright] is in fact a word frequently heard in discussions of cuteness, connotating sunshine, happiness, smiles, and a general state of positiveness, and a sunny disposition is especially expected of women."[33]

I agree with McVeigh that socially girls and women are expected to predominantly display happy emotions, but females have a full range of emotions that they are not able to openly display without being shunned in society. Therefore, cute objects are able to be the medium girls can use to express more than just happiness through. Kogepan and DOB are examples of objects that are used to show other emotions on this spectrum. By interacting with a Kogepan item, girls are allowed to express their gloominess in a quiet, private manner.

Kogepan gives the viewer the feeling of empathy, making the observer want to comfort the depressed piece of bread. He cannot offer the observer the ability to be an emotion sponge; instead he appears as though he must be comforted. Curled up into fetal position, Kogepan is mimicking the mannerisms of a melancholy person. With a blank mouth and empty eyes, there is no doubt that he is gloomy and troubled. His sympathetic muted expression offers an outlet for girls to express their sadness. In his pathetic posture, Kogepan offers girls a tool to reflect their pain and sadness. Even if one is having a bad day, Kogepan is always more pathetic and dismal.

1.6 The *Shōjo*

The most common consumer of cute products such as Hello Kitty, DOB and Kogepan is

[32] Translated from the Japanese, その為「どうせすてるんでしょ」を決めゼリフ…
[33] Brian McVeigh, "Affection, Authority and Gender in the Everyday Object of Japan," *Journal of Material Culture*, no. 1.3 (1996): 300.

the *shōjo* (young lady). *Shōjo* is an elastic term, usually used to describe women who are between puberty and marriage. In her article, "Girls are dancin': Shōjo Culture and Feminism in Contemporary Japanese Art," Emily Wakeling describes the *shōjo* as:

> "free and arrogant, unlike meek and dutiful *musume* (daughter) or pure and innocent *otome* (maiden)'. "Daughter" and "maiden" both suggest the presence of a male authority in determining the girl's identity, while the concept of the *shōjo* has neither of these connections."[34]

The term *Shōjo* cannot be bound by a reading of one's age or social status, but within the identification of being a member of the community of girls. *Shōjo* is commonly read as the period between puberty and marriage, but it became obvious to me during the course of my research that the term *shōjo* cannot be mapped chronologically.

Harumi (24), wasn't satisfied with the question, "do you think cute things are childish?" She included a note about how the word cute in Japanese has a different meaning than it does in English. She asked if in America cute things are childish because they don't have that meaning to Japanese people.[35] To further explain her comment, she included a story that reflected the limitlessness of cuteness for the girl. She explained that her 80-year-old grandmother was called "cute" by an immigration officer during a trip to Hawaii. Her grandmother felt happy that the officer had acknowledged her cuteness even at such an old age. Harumi's personal statement shows the lifelong connection Japanese women have with cuteness. It is a positive relationship that at no matter what age, conjures up nostalgic memories of girlhood.

Christine Yano notes that when a cute image such as Hello Kitty is placed on an object, it

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[34] Emily Wakeling, "Girls are dancin': Shōjo Culture and Feminism in Contemporary Japanese Art," *New Voice: A Journal for Emerging Scholars of Japanese Studies in Australia and New Zealand*, no. 5 (2011): 131.

[35] In January 20, 2016 e-mail interview with Harumi, she asked:「日本人は『かわいい』という言葉を、それほど悪い意味で使わない。アメリカでは違う意味合いなのかな？子どもっぽいという感じなのかな？『かわいい』に関する、私の身近な事例」

creates a link for the object into the world of the *shōjo*.[36] This link isn't just consumed by girls, older women and mothers can also consume cute objects, creating a link to their inner *shōjo*. In "Cuteness as Japan's Millennial Products," Anne Allison explains that for older women, cuteness involves an emotional attachment to items that resonate back to their *shōjo* childhood.[37] By creating a perpetual *shōjo* mentality, generations of cute consumers come together through commodities.[38] This shows that *shōjo* is a mentality rather than a chronological stage.

When women get older they continue to consume cute items but in a quiet manner, as opposed to younger *shōjo* who openly consume cuteness in a flashy manner. When Ayana was interviewed, she was the only person to answer "No" to the question, "do you carry cute items around with you?" She did say that she buys cute items but chooses not to carry them around with her. This could be that since she is a bit older than the rest of the girls, she has decided to no longer carry around cute items with her. Ayana's response further supports the idea that women consume cuteness more quietly as they get older.

(figure 8)

[36] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 62.
[37] Anne Allison, "Cuteness as Japan's Millennial Product," in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, ed. Joseph Jay Tobin (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004), 35.
[38] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 83.

Emily Wakeling points out that female Japanese artist, Yanagi Miwa's *My Grandmothers* (figure 8) series shows the agelessness of the *shōjo* spirit. In Miwa's series, she has Japanese girls in their twenties wear makeup to pretend they are elderly, and then asks them to pose in positions acting out what they hope their future will be like in fifty years. Many of the *shōjo* subjects go against the idealized image of the fragile, conservative elderly lady, and dream of independence and being unattached to the conventional family structure. The "old girls" are cheerful and energetic, portraying themselves as an extension of their current *shōjo* life. These girls, no matter what their age, hope to always be a *shōjo.*[39] Like Wakeling, literary scholar Takahara Eiri describes the "girl consciousness" as being a view that valorizes the fantastic and "through her consciousness, she will be astounded to discover a world that permits anything imaginable."[40] In a world that is saturated with the ideas of adult men, girls use cuteness to change the atmosphere around them into an expressive, fantastic place.

1.7 Kawaii is feminine

At 20 years old, Mako is a sophomore at university. Mako's experience of being called cute wasn't limited to her physical appearance, she has also been called cute because of her behavior. When asked, "Can all women of any age enjoy cute things or are they just for children and teenagers? She commented, "Despite age, they can be enjoyed. I think there are more women than men who enjoy cute objects."[41] Mako highlights the relationship between the femininity and cuteness by pointing out that females are the ones who consume cuteness.

[39] Wakeling, "Girls are dancin': Shōjo Culture and Feminism in Contemporary Japanese Art," 137.
[40] Takahara Eiri, "The Consciousness of the Girl: Freedom and Arrogance," in *Woman Critiqued: translated essays on Japanese women's writing*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 193.
[41] In January 24, 2016 e-mail interview with Mako, she answered:「世代に関係なく愛されているが、女性のほうが男性よりも可愛いものを愛する割合が高いと思う」

During early childhood, social roles are apparent and enforced by parents. Girls are expected to be feminine, and are socialized to be so. Mothers dress their daughters up with pink clothing, accessorizing the outfit with lace and ribbon. Yano believes that when a mother teaches her daughter about cuteness, she is not only passing down the knowledge of cute culture, but also transforming her adult world into a place of play filled with nostalgic images of childhood.[42] Through their daughters, women can return to the fantastic world of the girl.

Aside from the usage of cuteness by their mother, young girls are also introduced to cuteness as being associated with femininity. In Mitsuhashi Koji and Matthew Burdelski's article "She Thinks You're Kawaii," they quote a psycholinguistic interview with Japanese preschool students, questioning them about the usage of the word *kawaii*. This interview suggests that preschool girls (ages three to six) are three times more likely to call themselves *kawaii*. As they get closer to the six year mark, girls are nine times more likely to call themselves cute than boys.[43] This behavior suggests that girls are introduced to the word "cute" and cute culture in a positive manner. They associate it with pleasant feelings which open the door to a fantastic world within the girl community. Girls pull objects and images from fairy tales in order to change the atmosphere around them, shifting from dread for the future to a time full of happiness and positive energy. Osuka Eiji refers to the world of the *shōjo* as "an exotic and longed-for world of individual fulfillment, decadence, consumption and play."[44]

1.8 Consumers of Cuteness

Shopping is an activity commonly associated with girls due to department stores being a popular location of socialization. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski points out that,

[42] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 11.
[43] Mitsuhashi Koji and Matthew Burdelski, "She Thinks You're Kawaii: Socializing Affect, Gender and Relationships in a Japanese Preschool," *Language in Society* no. 39.1 (2010): 68.
[44] See Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan."

“women have been portrayed as victims of the ideology of consumerism, trapped in a web of objectified images which alienate them from their true identity.”[45] Rather than view consumerism as the mechanism of patriarchal society, it can be argued that girls can make choices and have their desires fulfilled through consumerism. For a product to be popular, the distributor must think like a girl, in order to cater to the audience they wish to appeal to. Through this thought process, girls have gained influential economic power. Cute culture is not girls out of control, it’s actually “girls gaining control of their consumer lives and in-group expressions.”[46]

Hiromi is a 21-year-old girl in her sophomore year at college, with an undecided major. When asked about what features cute objects have, her answer was, "I think that they have a connecting effect for people. When someone has something I think is cute, I empathize with them and it creates an opportunity for me to become friends with them."[47] For Hiromi, cuteness is the vehicle which enables her to communicate and interact with other girls. She also reported that her current favorite cute item is "a small earring in my favorite color and when I wear it my confidence increases."[48] Not only do cute things help her express herself and raise her self-esteem, but they are also a medium for participation in girls’ culture. Cute is not simply just the object, it also reflects back on the beholder and it even describes relationships among girls.

By using the department store as a place to socialize and meet friends, girls have established places of communication to share and express themselves. By gaining an influential amount of consumption power, girls have established a cute shopping capital in Tokyo, Harajuku. Although cute objects are designed in way that enables them to reflect a spectrum of emotions,

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[45] See Rita Felksi, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 63.
[46] Yano, *Pink Globalization*, 52.
[47] In January 21, 2016 e-mail interview with Hiromi, she answered:「人を繋ぐ効果があると思います。自分と相手が可愛いと思うものが前にあると、共感し、仲良くなるきっかけになると思います」
[48] Ibid., 「ピアス 小さくて、色も自分の好みの色で、身につけると自信が湧くから」

the most commonly appearing type of cuteness in Harajuku is sweet cute. By filling store displays with happy cute objects, Harajuku is transformed into a giant fantastic cocoon that girls are able to playfully engage in. The important part about Harajuku is that it offers a space for a girls' community. Sara Ahmed's essay "Happy Objects" explains that:

> "groups cohere around a shared orientation towards some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight. If the same objects make us happy - or if we invest in the same object as being what should make us happy - then we would be orientated or direct in the same way… Happy objects are passed around, accumulating positive affect value as social goods."[49]

Harajuku creates a full fantasy world of saturated happiness; a place where one cannot help but view everything from the angle of a joyful consumer. It is common to hear girls yelling "*Aaa kawaii!*" (It's so cute!) while walking around Harajuku.

1. 9 Emergence of Cute

Cute culture didn't develop into a dominant trend until the early 1970's. Around this time a handwriting style emphasizing cuteness and childishness emerged in Japanese schools.[50] This handwriting reflected cuteness by filling the pages with positive cute images, such as hearts and animals baring minimal facial features except for large, expressive eyes. Cute handwriting also stylized Japanese characters into more of a rounded shape, appearing almost as a sweet confectionary in its bubbly softness. Due to its extremely stylized presentation, it was difficult for people outside the group of girls with cute handwriting to decipher it. This led to some schools banning cute handwriting from assignments and tests.[51] Girls commonly used this form of handwriting when writing notes to one another and themselves. By using this style of writing,

[49] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 35.
[50] Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 222.
[51] Ibid., 222.

girls created their own form of language where they could communicate freely through cuteness. Kinsella notes that in her research she discovered that older students were more likely to use cute handwriting. Cute handwriting is still used by girls in Japan today, but rather than stylizing the writing to such a degree of illegibility, girls now look to stationary and other *fanshi guuzu* (fancy goods) to reflect their cute world.

In 1971 Sanrio started experimenting with printing cute designs on writing paper and stationary in an attempt to appeal to girls engaging in the cute handwriting trend. Currently in Japan, there are multi-level department stores devoted to stationary alone. Stationary is only a part of the umbrella term of fancy goods, which includes cuddly toys, bags, lunch boxes and other portable commodities. Fancy goods are usually items that are small, round, soft, loveable, dreamy, frilly and fluffy. These images are commonly associated with the girl herself. Young Japanese women, purchase cute accessories and fill their rooms, cars, desks at work, and handbags with sweet paraphernalia as a way of surrounding themselves by cuteness.[52] It isn't an uncommon sight to see small stuffed animals dangling from the schools bags and purses of Japanese girls. For a young office lady, having cute objects around her desk transforms her surrounding space within the male dominated work force and allows her to carry around a piece of nostalgia from her girlish cocoon.

Gift giving of fancy goods between girls is another way that they are able to spread cuteness within the group, strengthening the bond of girl culture. Asumi is 24-years-old and living at home while looking for work as a teacher. Asumi's current favorite cute object is a wallet. When asked why this wallet was special to her, she said that, “I had wanted it for a long time and it was given to me as a present, because of this, it is special and has strong emotional

[52] Ibid., 237.

attachments."[53] Asumi's answer displays that who gives the cute object can affect the feelings developed for the object. She chose to focus her answer on the origin of the object, rather than what it looked like. For Asumi, she and her friends share the bond of cute culture by giving and receiving presents. Gift giving has always been a valued custom in Japanese society, girls have included cute items and fancy goods as a currency of exchange in their *shōjo* world.

1.10 "*Kawaii* Syndrome"

There are some concerns from feminists that the *kawaii* "syndrome" (*shookoogun*) which emphasizes cute goods, forces women to subordinate themselves to men.[54] Although this could be a valid point, I believe that cuteness is something that has always been in Japanese society, it is just recently in the last forty years, coming to the forefront of Japanese girls' culture. By looking at the spectrum of cuteness, and how girls use these objects as vehicles of expression, it can be concluded that cuteness benefits girls as an outlet, rather than a space to demoralize them. Knowing that they will eventually have to conform to the standard roles forced onto them as women in Japanese society, girls use cuteness to cope with social constraints and build community between one another. Living within the fantastic realm of the girl, they are able to project onto their cute items, shift the atmosphere around them and aspire to a world beyond what their reality allows.

[53] In January 21, 2016 e-mail interview with Asumi, she answered:「ピアス 小さくて、色も自分の好みの色で、身につけると自信が湧くから」

[54] Mitsuhashi Koji and Matthew Burdelski, "She Thinks You're Kawaii: Socializing Affect, Gender and Relationships in a Japanese Preschool," 67.

Chapter 2: Becoming Alice

"When I was a girl, there was nothing more important than the infinitely rich 'world of our own.' So those of us who cherished this world joined together and build a small enclosure to protect our secret garden"[55]

- Honda Masuko (1993:36)

2.1 Introduction

In 2004, Tetsuya Nakashima released a film titled *Kamikaze Girls* (*Shimotsuma Monogatari).*[56] The protagonist in the film is a Japanese "Lolita"[57] named Momoko. The audience is introduced to her in the beginning of the film when her scooter bike careens into a cabbage truck. Upon impact she is thrown into the air, floating and swirling around in slow motion before she descends downward, like Alice falling down the rabbit hole. As she spins in the air, the ribbons and bows on her white lace trimmed dress twirl around, and her white petticoat ruffles in the breeze.

For this moment, the girl's cute world is captured within the movement of ribbons and bows. In her work, "The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl," Honda Masuko makes a direct link between the ribbons and frills on the dress of a *shōjo* and their use as a vehicle for transportation to the world of the girl. Her essay focuses on the sound that the fluttering of ribbons make, *hirahira*, and how this subtly captures the delicate transient nature of the *shōjo*-world. This creates not just an identity but also a landscape where girls can enjoy a fantastic world. By bringing the two together, it affirms the relationship between frilly aesthetic cute

[55] Honda Masuko, "The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl," in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (New York: Routledge, 1993), 36.
[56] The film was based on the book *Shimotsuma Monogatari - Yankee Girl & Lolita Girl* by Novala Takemoto, published in 2002.
[57] Lolita fashion can be described as a style wherein girls dress up in clothing inspired by the Victorian era. Featuring excessive frills, lace and bows, Lolita fashion gives the wearer the appearance of an idealized aristocratic aesthetic.

fashion and the girl. As Masafumi Monden describes it in his essay, "Being Alice in Japan," Momoko's style maintains an, "intricate balance between infantile cuteness, asexuality, and a sense of independence, which, delicately and implicitly, points to the construction of a girlish yet not necessarily passive or objectified mode of female appearance."[58] Momoko's delicate clothing allows her to be independent from society, giving her a form of non-sexual elegant assertiveness.

My previous chapter argued that cute objects speak for the silenced voices of girls allowing them to express themselves and heal within the patriarchal constraints of Japanese society. Dressing in cute Lolita fashion allows girls to absorb the visual power of cute items in a way that does not disrupt and threaten social order. In her research, "Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing and Defying," Teresa Younker references East Asian Studies scholar, Brian McVeigh's explanation that, "cuteness is used to soften up the vertical society, to soften the power relations and present authority without being threatening."[59] I agree with McVeigh, that cuteness does allow for a softening of social order, but disagree that there is no authority behind the actions of girls; this idea weakens what girls are trying to achieve. When girls, such as Momoko, dress in Lolita fashion, they are going a step beyond consuming cute objects by becoming a cute object themselves. This enables girls to form an identity within the *shōjo*-world and become a member of the group of cute consumers.

This chapter will argue that, by becoming the cute object themselves, girls are being members of a 'delicate rebellion,' and engaging in a fashion that celebrates the cuteness of girlhood. In her essay, "Cuties in Japan," sociologist Sharon Kinsella analyzes many facets of Japanese cute culture, including fashion. Her argument is that cute fashion is a form of rebellion

[58] Masafumi Monden, "Being Alice in Japan: Performing a Cute, 'girlish' Revolt," *Japan Forum*, no. 26.2 (2014): 281.
[59] Teresa Younker, "Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing, Defying," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, no. 11.1 (2011): 100.

against social values and realities. She emphasizes that this form of rebellion is demure rather than aggressive and sexually provocative like ones that are typical of western youth cultures.[60] Therefore, Lolita fashion can be referred to as a 'delicate rebellion.' As a result of the strong group mentality in Japan, Lolita fashion allows girls to rebel without being loud, which in a society that values uniformity would cause social ostracization. Lolita fashion frequently mentions *Alice in Wonderland*, the 1865 novel by Lewis Carroll, Alice being the original *shōjo*. Like Alice, Lolitas have a wonderland of their own, Harajuku. The Lolita fashion has many facets and this chapter will discuss the history, types and reasons girls dress in this style. Next, it will discuss the link between Lolita and *Alice in Wonderland* and the importance of Harajuku as the heart of cute Lolita fashion. And lastly the chapter explores the unpleasant form that Lolita takes when sexualized by the male gaze. When outsiders view Lolita culture, they ask why a grown woman would dress in this manner. Some fans who fetishize Japanese popular culture seem overly fascinated with Lolicon; a short form of "Lolita Complex." They emphasize the dark component of Japanese Lolita culture rather than looking at what girls themselves are trying to express. This chapter takes the pieces of this image apart in order to give young women the agency they deserve.

[60] Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1995), 243.

2.2 Ribbons and Girlhood

"Of all the signs in the visual sphere, the one that predominates is that of fluttering 'ribbons and frills.' Colorful ribbons flicker in the hair of girl students while the Takarazuka stage overflows with frills and lace. And it is beribboned maidens who feature in the world of lyrical illustrations passionately admired by girls."[61]

- Honda Masuko (1993:28)

The proto-image of the cute girl (picture to the left) depicted girls with oval faces and pointed chins, small but full lips, exaggerated eyes with prominent lashes and fair skin. Although she is facing the viewer, the eyes are looking away, expressing shyness, which emphasizes purity and innocence. The large ribbon on her head and waist are common images within the current Lolita fashion subculture, tying the image of the Jun'ichi girl to current Lolitas. In his book, *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, Masafumi Monden argues that Jun'ichi Nakahara's art can be described as the intersection between early 1900's *shōjo* culture and the more modern *kawaii* aesthetic.[62] Jun'ichi is credited for drawing images of girls with exaggerated eyes who wear decorative clothing that sports bows or ribbons. These girls were known as "Jun'ichi's maidens." Birthed from the popularity of his artwork, a trend called "Jun'ichi ribbons" was born and these ribbons were successfully sold as hair accessories in a department store in Ginza.[63] Boys were unable to appreciate the beauty of these

[61] Honda Masuko, "The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl," 28.
[62] Masafumi Monden, *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 81.
[63] See Honda, "The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl," 28.

girls, believing that all the girls look the same. Therefore, ribbons became a symbol and a link to the cute aesthetic of the girl's world. Even within the lens of contemporary popular culture, ribbons and bows became a staple in the wardrobe of cute girls. Lolita dress always includes ribbons, bows and lace, producing and reinforcing the fantasy world of the *shōjo*.

2.3 History of Lolita

In the early 1980s, Japanese female pop idols were closely associated with the *kawaii* aesthetic. Their uniforms were pastel colored frills and lace dresses.[64] This could be considered the mainstream prototype for Lolita fashion. Lolita fashion appeared in the early 1990s but before that, the beginnings of Lolita fashion can be seen emerging from companies such as Milk, Pink House and Angelic Pretty, companies that pioneered Lolita fashion in the early 1970s. In his work, "Urban Princess: Performance and Women's Language in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture," Isaac Gagné notes that it is believed that the term Lolita came to Japan with the translation of the Vladimir Nabokov novel *Lolita*.[65] In this meaning of the word, it was used to express the sexual desires of older men for young girls. In is unclear why the Lolita community chose this word as the one to represent their community and little information is available on the actual origin of the word. To distinguish themselves form the pedophilic definition of the word lolita, Lolitas' have adopted a nonstandard way of spelling the name of their community ロリータ, "substituting an alternate phonetic katakana character イ to enunciate the "ī" (-) sound in the

[64] See Monden, *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, 80.
[65] Issac Gagné, "Urban Princesses: Performance and 'Women's Language' in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture," *Journal of Linguistics Anthropology*, no. 18.1 (2008): 135.

word."[66] The extra syllable demarcates the difference between *Lolita* the novel and Lolita the subculture. Lolitas want to maintain the innocent, cute aesthetic associated with youthfulness, rather than being the fetishized cute object of the male gaze.

2.4 Lolita Subgenres

Lolita fashion uses Victorian Era and Rococo Period clothing as their inspiration for the style, specifically the aristocratic aesthetic. Essentially, Lolita fashion transforms the girls into living symbols of cute. Lolita dress is fragmented into several classifications but this paper will focus on the three largest subgenres: Sweet Lolita, Classic/Traditional Lolita and Gothic Lolita. The proper Lolita aesthetic can be broken down into: headwear, blouse, bell-shaped skirt, undergarments, legs and footwear. Accessories always include some form of ribbons or bows. Although all of these genres differ, there are overlapping elements creating a united aesthetic. The most prominent occurring themes are cuteness with ribbons and lace. In her essay, "Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita," Theresa Winge breaks down the subgenres of the Lolita fashion by providing detailed descriptions of the fashion by each of the subgenres. Her text offers a detailed description of the variations of the Lolita subgenres, which are usually hard to distinguish unless one is trained to notice the differences.

[66] Ibid., 135.

2.5 Classic/Traditional Lolita

Classic Lolita draws its inspiration from *Alice in Wonderland* and Victorian porcelain dolls. The clothing is worn in such a way that it deemphasizes the body by providing a high waistline and the skirt falls past the knees with layers of petticoats further concealing the hips.[67] The colors of the dresses are muted, never bold. Accessories will include historical imagery such as broaches or keys. The tamest of all the Lolita styles, these clothes might be worn to a Victorian garden party. It is common to see a Classic Lolita with ringlets in her hair and a bonnet covering her head. All of the Lolita subgenres wear something on their head, so as to not waste any bodily space that might be available to decorate. There is even a type of bow referred to as an "Alice bow," which is oversized and covers most of the top of the head. All Lolitas will wear Mary Jane shoes that were inspired by *Alice in Wonderland*. Some Classic Lolitas will walk around with dolls, stuffed animals or small purses. When posing for pictures, it is not uncommon to see Classic Lolitas point their toes inward and slightly tilt their head, emphasizing the cute, soft aesthetic that radiates from this form of dress. Enchanted by the clothing of the Classic Lolita, girls viewing them are temporarily transported to the Victorian Era.

[67] Theresa Winge, "Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita," *Mechademia*, no. 3.1 (2008): 54.

2.6 Sweet Lolita

Sweet Lolita is the most popular form of Lolita and is known for its excessive use of the *kawaii* aesthetic.[68] This form is also inspired by *Alice in Wonderland* and Rococo period clothing. As it is a common theme in Lolita, Sweet as well as Classic Lolitas wear dresses that deemphasizes the figure through a high waistline and full knee-length skirts.[69] The color theme of Sweet Lolita dresses is full of pastels, pink being the favorite color of choice. The dress of a Sweet Lolita will have accents of bows, ruffles and lace, but what distinguishes her from Classic Lolita is her use of images of strawberries or confectionary sweets. Sweet Lolita is saccharide cuteness, linking Alice's love of sweets with the world of the girl. The accessories of a Sweet Lolita will be hyperfeminine, including heart shaped purses and lacy handkerchiefs. Momoko from Kamikaze Girls was a Sweet Lolita, and her favorite store was Baby the Stars Shine Bright, the most famous of all the designer Sweet Lolita companies.

[68] Ibid., 54.
[69] Ibid., 54.

2.7 Gothic Lolita

Much like the scary, cute objects discussed in Chapter 1.4, this Lolita style offers a dark

twist on cuteness. It is believed that the style for this fashion is not only inspired by Victorian porcelain dolls but also "mourning clothes associated with Queen Victoria herself."[70] The skirt volume and length of this style depends on the desired effect of the wearer. It can range from above the knee to floor length. The colors used in this style are primarily black, with white or red lace ribbon accents. The fabric used ranges from satin to velvet. Accessories carried by these Lolitas include coffin shaped purses and injured stuffed animals. This style is a lot bolder than the Classic and Sweet Lolita and expresses a darker, gloomier image.

2.8 Male Lolitas?

In order for men to enter the fantastic world of the girl they must tap into 'girl consciousness.' An example of this would be the world famous Mana-sama (image to the right), designer of *Moi-Meme-Moitte*, a line of elegant Gothic Lolita

[70] Ibid., 54.

clothing. He is best known as the front man of the *visual kei* (visual type) band *Malice Mizer*. He is known for using female speech patterns and feminine mannerisms when wearing Gothic Lolita dress. Terasa Younker conducted fieldwork in the 2005 working for Lolita companies which she shares her experiences in her essay, "Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing, Defying." In her research she notes that there is no *shonen* (boy) equivalent to the Lolita. The closest would be the "Aristocratic (usually Victorian) look," and when worn by males, it has an exclusively adult feel.[71] The display of youthful cuteness is thus unique to the *shōjo*. Men who want to be a Lolita, must cross-dress to access the feeling of the *shōjoscape*. In her article, "Power Play and Performance in Harajuku," Amelia Groom points out that many men who portray feminine characters and cross dress in *visual kei* bands will take on female names and personalities.[72] This furthers the idea that the fantastic world of the girl can only be entered by men when they try to tap into "girl consciousness." By wearing female clothing and adopting female names, men can peek into the world of the girl through Lolita fashion. Researching the idea of gender in Japanese society is not within the scope of this research, but it can be argued that there is a strong link between having a girl's mentality and one's ability to access Lolita fashion.

2.9 Delicate Rebellion

Japan emphasizes group identity, causing conformity of individual's fashion. By wearing an alternative version of clothing, or even something fantastic like a Lolita dress, for the wearer, it provides a safe feeling of individuality. Groom points out that, "because of the conformative nature of dress in Japan, the intensity of the pleasure in the individualistic operation of dressing

[71] Younker, "Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing, Defying," 106.
[72] Amelia Groom, "Power Play and Performance in Harajuku," *A Journal for Emerging Scholars of Japanese Studies in Australia and New Zealand*, no. 4, (2011): 200.

is heightened."[73] When Rinrin Doll, an advocate for Lolita fashion and renowned within the Lolita community, was asked to explain in an interview why she liked Lolita culture she replied, "Lolita is modest and loud at the same time. There is a little bit of a feminist point to it as well. Where you are not really dressing for the male view, you are dressing for yourself and your friends and it's just something you really want to do."[74] Lolita clothing acts as a suit of armor for the girl, allowing her to rebel against Japan's oppressive social expectations on young women by emerging from her fantastic cocoon and fluttering her wings. Clothing is the "boundary between body, self, and society."[75]

Christine Yano's book *Pink Globalization*, notes that it is not uncommon for authoritative sources such as police officers to use cuteness as a way to mask their power.[76] Lolita fashion acts as a similar mask for girls. Rather than outwardly protesting their dissatisfaction with society in a loud voice, Lolita offers a public way to display their dissatisfaction quietly. Honda explains that, "girls…never assert themselves against those who deride them. Neither do they declare a clear "no" against the everyday order. Instead, they remain self-sufficiently in a corner, where they merely lithely continue to protect their own being."[77] For girls, Lolita fashion offers a space where they can project their outer expression of something waiting to get out, without social repercussions.

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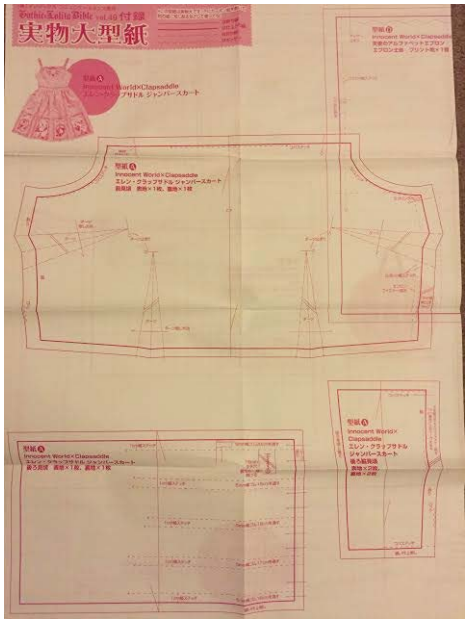
[73] Ibid., 195.
[74] Sonya Esman interviewed Rinrin Doll for a fashion segment on a very successful YouTube entertainment site called Icon Network.
[75] Monden, "Being Alice In Japan: Performing a Cute, 'girlish' Revolt," 266.
[76] See Christine R. Yano, *Pink Globalization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 61.
[77] Honda, "The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl," 36.

2.10 The Lolita Community

Aside from having visual badges of community in their clothing, Gagné notes that Lolitas also have their own form of language:

> "The Lolita style of speaking differs from those used by other young women's counterpublics both past and present in its use of the honorific language and feminized word construction idealized in contemporary media as *joseigo*. In postwar Japan, *joseigo* connotes educated upper-class femininity. Lolita borrows this connotation by recasting *joseigo* as *shukujo no kotoba* or lady's speech, and using it as a way to affect the image of the princess."[78]

Gagné refers to Lolitas as princesses because they are cute, youthful, feminine, and participate in seemingly aristocratic hobbies such as tea parties. By using *joseigo*, Lolitas have created a 'virtual speech community,' which allows all girls in this community, no matter what dialect they speak, access to magazines about Lolita culture.[79]



Clothing pattern from inside *Gothic & Lolita Bible*

Gothic & Lolita Bible, is one of the most famous Lolita magazines in production. The magazine is full of high quality, glossy images of various Lolitas, modeling current fashion trends. The Lolita's complex outfits have been dismantled, providing detailed descriptions of where to purchase the items they are wearing. For girls who do not live in a major city, there is contact information for companies that accept mail orders. In this

[78] Gagné, "Urban Princesses: Performance and 'Women's Language' in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture," 134.
[79] Ibid., 134.

magazine there is a section called *Sudoi no Hiroba* (gathering place) where girls from all over Japan can correspond with one another by including cute drawings, photographs, and letters.[80] This Gathering Place offer a safe place where girls can strengthen the bond that cute Lolita fashion has created for them. Gagné notes that in volume 8 of *Gothic & Lolita Bible*, a girl submitted a letter that was published in the Gathering Place saying, "I don't have any Lolita friends yet. But reading this book, I came to realize that I have lots of friends, and I was so happy! Thank you!"[81] This statement reflects the importance of community within the Lolita subculture. In every quarterly issue of *Gothic & Lolita Bible* there is a clothing pattern from a high end Lolita designer enabling every girl to become a member of the fantastic world of Lolita. These magazines are a conduit to community for the girl. No matter where the reader lives, she can become an active member in the *shōjo*-world by reading magazines and engaging with other girls through them.

Cutie is another popular cute Lolita magazine, but this magazine chooses to feature normal girls in their magazines rather than hiring models. According to Yuko Kurokawa's essay, "Vivienne Westwood's Seditionaries: Clothes and the Change in Japanese Girls' Cute Fashions in the Early 1990s," *Cutie* didn't fill its pages with classic beauty, instead they chose normal girls to model, believing that they looked as if they had minds of their own.[82] This allowed the cute girl image to be accessible to every girl, rather than displaying a perfect model with unobtainable beauty goals. The cover of the first issue of *Cutie* carried the phrase "Radical and Cute"

[80] Ibid., 137.
[81] Ibid., 137.
[82] Kurokawa Yuko, "Vivienne Westwood's 'Seditionaries' Clothes and the Change in Japanese Girls' Cute Fashion in the Early 1990's," *Costume Journal of Costume Society*, no. 47.1 (2013): 65.

(*raijikaru ando kyuto*).[83] In early prints, the magazine frequently featured special articles focusing on the cuteness within the brand Milk.[84]

Q-pot accessories

2.11 Becoming the Cute Object

There are many shops that sell cute culture to girls. Although girls are being targeted for their consumerism, it can be argued that girls shape the market by either using or withholding their purchasing power. On their website, the Japanese fairy tale shop Q-pot, describes the company as being not only a fashion brand, but a "communication tool" aiming to connect people to one another.[85] They create "positive accessories," so that people can smile and feel happy continuously, not only those who chose to wear their products but also those who see the people wearing them. Q-pot wants everyone to "travel in a unique fantasy world!" Seeing a girl wearing Q-pot is much the same as when a girl in regular clothing will see a girl in Lolita fashion. The Lolita will trigger from within a girl, the same feelings that a cute object would. Feelings of warmth and happiness swell up from within the girl. The Lolita becomes the cute object, which has a positive effect on all those around her. The goal of companies such as Q-pot is to create this feeling since it is what the girl consumer desires. If they do not cater to the consumer market then the company will not profit.

[83] Ibid., 65.
[84] Ibid., 67.
[85] Q-pot online shop, accessed February 25, 2016. http://www.q-pot.jp/shop/.

2.12 Alice's Voyage to Japan

Maruyama Eikon's 1910 *Ai-chan No Yume Monogatari* (Fantastic Tales of Ai) is said to be the first completed translation of *Alice in Wonderland*.[86] Since then, Alice has gained immense popularity with girls in Japan. The contemporary admiration of Alice is credited to Sir John Tenniel's famed illustrations (1865 and 1872) and Walt Disney's classic rendition *Alice in Wonderland*, which came to Japan in 1952.[87] Since this international journey, Alice has birthed the Lolita culture, by drawing attention to her Victorian-esque style clothing, and her acknowledgement by Japanese girls as being the ideal cute *shōjo*. Monden believes that Alice is popular in Japan because the imagery of an, "independent girl with 'infantile' cuteness is a highly appropriate vehicle for women in Japan… a compromise between female autonomy and the concept of *kawaii*. Subtly nuanced, sweet aesthetics with no overt hint of female sexual allure..."[88] The cute aesthetic can be compatible with a sense of freedom and agency, like Alice herself.[89]

Monden quotes theorist Roland Barthes's argument that a good costume, "had a powerful semantic value: it was not there only to be seen, it was also there to be read, it communicated ideas, information, or sentiments."[90] A girl dressing in Lolita wants to convey the message that, cute femininity need not be eroticized. In short, Lolita dress expresses the girl's desire to detach

[86] See Monden, *Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and Gender in Contemporary Japan*, 86.
[87] Ibid., 86.
[88] Ibid., 88.
[89] Ibid., 100.
[90] Ibid., 93.

from patriarchal society. The separation from society is evident in, "the embrace of predominantly young girls' period dress, the absence of male figures and the obvious girlish qualities such as the dreamy, fairy-tale narratives and sugar voices [used]."[91] The cuteness of Lolita allows girls to emphasize their femininity and express dissatisfaction with the male-dominated world.

2.13 Wonderland is the Girl's Cocoon

In Japanese the title of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is frequently translated as *Fushigi no Kuni no Arisu*. This title has a marvelous feel to it. As Sean Somers points out in his essay, "Arisu in Harajuku," "in this context, the word *fushigi* may suggest a variety of atmospheric sensations, including wonder, but also mystery, strangeness, bewilderment, or fear."[92] This entices the Japanese reader with an alternative realm of aesthetic fascination. Essentially, Lolitas remove Alice from "Wonderland" and they implant themselves in her world. By entering "Wonderland," a girl can break-free of her prescribed role in Japanese society, a structure that suppresses individual personality. Somers believes that to these girls, "*Arisu*, represents a personality shift from depression into wonder. "Wonderland" acts as a therapeutic site for psychological healing, through transformative identity performances in which *fushigi* acts as the mechanism of awakening."[93] Wonderland creates an alternative space for identity and identification.

[91] Ibid., 93.
[92] Sean Somers, "Arisu in Harajuku" in *Alice Beyond Wonderland: Essay for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Cristopher Hollingsworth (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2009), 199.
[93] Ibid., 200.

Going to the *fushigi* world, should not be shrugged off as simple escapism, it "recontextualizes the negative emotional effects of the past into therapeutic experiences of creativity within wonderland."[94] To dismiss the importance of the girl world is to undermine the value that it holds to the girl community. Escapism carries a connotation of fleeing and defeat, which is the opposite of what girls are doing. The *fushigi* world provides a place that rather than being alone and isolated, girls can come together and express their individuality. The acts of reading and pretending to live in "Wonderland," provide a catalyst for girls to come together. These girls who are portraying Alice might appear to be stereotypically feminine but their fashion is fantastic and outrageous, challenging normative behavior when compared to the prescriptive role of the office lady.[95] This lifestyle allows the wearer to venture into the world of the *fushigi* to rediscover wonder in the world.

It is easy to dismiss girls' culture and reference their love for cute aesthetic as childish. Sharon Kinsella acknowledges this in her groundbreaking essay, "Cuties in Japan" noting that, in the 1980s teen idol Yamada Kuniko coined the term *burikko* (fake children). This was due to the many infantile behaviors girls adopted during the 1970s emergence of cute culture.[96] Young people also started to purge on confectionaries in a child-like manner. Rather than calling this childish behavior, girls were simply indulging in foods they enjoy and wearing clothes that they like. In "Wonderland," Alice eats nothing but cookies, so girls in the "Wonderland" of Harajuku simply copy this behavior. Girls are not regressing into childhood they are enjoying the pleasures that are associated with nostalgic youth, such as eating sweets and living in innocence.

[94] Ibid., 204.
[95] Ibid., 208.
[96] See 1:9 Emergence of Cute, for information on cute handwriting and fancy goods.

2.14 Alice in Harajuku

Harajuku offers a space where the girl can become Alice through indulgence and enter the *fushigi* world. To find out how Lolitas feel about Harajuku, Kawamura Yuniya interviewed one asking her about Harajuku. The girl responded, "I love Harajuku. I go there almost every day. I like to watch people walking down the streets of Harajuku. I love the atmosphere of Harajuku. I like the smell of Harajuku. It's a sacred place for us."[97] Harajuku is a place where girls can enjoy the aesthetic pleasures of cuteness. Harajuku is an elaborate "Wonderland" that enables girls to exercise self-expression and enjoy girl culture without fear of being judged. It is home to many Lolita clothing shops, crepe shops, and accessory stores. It is easy to see the power that radiates from all the cute objects that surround the viewer. Harajuku is a place of self-expression and no matter what cute object a girl is looking for, she is surely able to find it in Harajuku. Although girls don't own the shops in Harajuku, they are the targeted demographic and because of this, everything in Harajuku needs to be suited for girl approval.

[97] Kawamura Yuniya, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures*, (New York: Berg Publishers, 2012), 66.

To ensure that the commodities are suited for the girl approval, many of the fashion designers for popular Lolita brands such as Baby the Stars Shine Bright and Alice and the Pirates are female. Kumiko Uehara is the head designer and in charge of the Sweet Lolita styles for the brand Baby the Stars Shine Bright. In an interview with the Youtube Channel Kawaii Pateen, Uehara explains that when she designs clothing, she chooses things girls love such as sweets and stuffed animals so she can, “make clothes which are full of girl’s dreams.” Having girls create cute objects and fashion for other girls reaches beyond simple consumerism and creates a level of market power. To appeal to a large socioeconomic range of girls, there are many second hand stores such as Closet Child, which sell Lolita fashion at a greatly discounted price. There is an attempt to invite all girls into the “Wonderland” of Harajuku by making cute accessories and clothing available to all girls.

Female Lolita fashion designers

2.15 Joy of Life Station

All students, with the exception of college students, wear a school uniform in Japan. Many girls will go to Harajuku after school with a change of

clothes so they can transform into their cute form after school. To aid in their transformation, there is a specific location girls congregate to, called the JOL (Joy of Life) Dream Station. The dream station has a stage, at which many local musicians will perform, a large television displaying popular Jdramas, food and shop stalls, computers with internet and a JOL dream station. The dream station is a small room where girls shed their confining cocoons and spread their wings as butterflies. The station contains multiple vanities, all with hair straighteners and curlers, as well as a small shop where girls can purchase makeup and fake eyelashes. The dream station is a shared enjoyable space, where girls transfigure into their happiest form.

2.16 Alice on Wednesday

Harajuku is home to one of the three "Alice on Wednesday" shops in which the patron is able to shrink and experience "Wonderland" though the eyes of Alice. The other shops can be found in Nagoya, and Osaka.[98] All of the shop locations require the visitor to enter the store through a miniature door. Rather than drinking a potion that reads "drink me," as the original Alice did, one must crouch down in order to successfully pass into the next room. From there the shop contains three floors of accessories and sweets, all containing imagery from *Alice in*

[98] 水曜日のアリス (Alice on Wednesday), accessed January 20, 2016. http://www.aliceonwednesday.jp/.

Wonderland. Throughout the store there are giant mushrooms to make the visitor feel small and remind her that she has entered "Wonderland." The Harajuku location is extremely popular, drawing lines that wrap around the nearby buildings. This shop offers all girls a chance to experience the fantastic and purchase Alice paraphernalia, creating a direct link between themselves and "Wonderland." There is no charge to enter the shop, nor is there a demand to purchase anything. By coming to the store with other girls, the bond of friendship and cuteness is strengthened through memories that are created in "Wonderland."

2.17 6% Dokidoki

6% Dokidoki is a brand created by Sebastian Masuda who refers to his designs as "sensational cuteness." *Japan Times* reporter Samuel Thomas, interviewed Masuda about his company and the meaning of *kawaii*, for his newspaper article "Let's Talk 100 Percent *Kawaii*."[99] Masuda advocates for the power of cute culture as a cultural revolution. He explains the cute revolution as, "giving girls a lot more freedom to express themselves outside of social norms, and giving them the power to create their own society. It has led to femininity, rather than masculinity, being a source of power." His designs are colorful, with items carrying phrases such as 革命 (revolution) or

[99] Samuel Thomas, "Let's Talk 100 Percent *Kawaii*," *The Japan Times*, July 2, 2013, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2013/07/02/style/lets-talk-100-percent-kawaii/.

kawaii anarchy. As a male figure, he is using his social power to make society more aware of girls' culture. In Masuda's designs, cuteness is turned into a weapon that girls can use against society. Masuda believes that *kawaii* relates to men too; by giving men a better understanding of feminine sensibilities, he hopes that men will feel more empathy towards women.

2.18 Queue Decora Fashion

Rikarin, the Harajuku girl interviewed in Chapter 1, named 6% Dokidoki as her favorite cute store and she has become an unofficial spokesperson for the company. Masuda's designs make the wearer feel uplifted through expressive color combinations. Rikarin refers to this fashion style as "Decora," a form of dress in which the wearer covers their body in layers of cute objects. Decora provides a visual bridge between the wearer and the fantastic world of the girl. A Decora girl saturates herself with cute accessories and due to the jumbled mess that can occur from the cluttered appearance,

Rikarin in Decora

the viewer reacts with a different feeling from that of the porcelain doll Lolita style. Decora is flashy and loud; a style that yells "*kawaii* anarchy." It is not surprising that 6% Dokidoki, in its

cute revolution is closely associated with this style. Rikarin's usage of band-aids illustrates the suffering that girls experience in society and the healing that they can achieve through the cute aesthetic. Lolitas use a delicate cuteness to express their rebellion, whereas the Decora girl chooses a louder form of cuteness to represent her rebellion.

A common theme in "Decora" fashion is the usage of eyeballs. An example of this would be the famous Harajuku fashion Decora girl turned singer, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu. Prior to her emergence into the music industry she was a frequent customer at the 6%Dokidoki shop. When she debuted as a singer, she asked Sabastian Masuda to create the set for her music video. Masuda credits his creativity for the set coming from the idea of, "Girls in the Room." The whole set was crafted based on how he thought a girl's room would look. The eyeballs on Kyary's pants and the eyes on the shirt of Rikarin reflect the constant voyeurism girls are subjected to in their daily life. The eyes reflect the gaze back at the viewer, protecting the girl from the sexualized male gaze of society.

2.19 Lolicon

As the parallels between Lolita cuteness and Decora cuteness reflect, the meaning of *kawaii* is diverse with a multitude of meanings and connotations. One of these connotations is the unpleasant sexualization of young girls, which in this paper I refer to as "Lolicon," a

shortened version of "Lolita Complex." In Gagné's conversations with Lolitas on the street and on web forums, many of the girls have a "very real fear of being appropriated not as a figure of identity, expressing their own idea of their authentic self, but instead recirculated as a sexualized, pornographic figure of desire, a costume-fetish character addressed to the desires of an indefinite population of *rorikon* fetishes."[100] Although unwanted, Lolitas can fall prey to the sexual gaze of the Japanese man and, as a result, areas in Japan where Lolitas gather are patrolled by police officers to protect girls from stalkers and predators.[101] In her essay, "Reorganizations of Gender and Nationalism," Feminist scholar Naitō Chizuko uses the term 'loliconization phenomenon' (*rorikonka genshō)* to:

> "indicate the commodification of children, young girls, and young women as sexual symbols in society. The term comes from 'Lolita complex,' which was originally used as a general term to indicate pedophiliac sexual desire. In contemporary Japan, its abbreviation 'lolicon' (*rorikon*) has become widespread due in part to its connection with otaku culture…"[102]

To fulfill their desires for girls as sex objects, many men frequent maid cafes, which cater to the male gaze.

2.20 Maid Café

Maid cafes are a direct link between cuteness and sexualization. There is a difference between the *otaku* driven *medio café* and the Alice tearooms used by the Lolita community. In maid cafes, young women wear stereotypical Victorian maid uniforms, and act like servants to their predominantly male customers. Somers describes this relationship as, "titillating playacting,

[100] Gagné, "Urban Princesses: Performance and 'Women's Language' in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture," 140.
[101] Winge, "Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita," 52.
[102] Naitō Chizuko and Nathan Shockey, "Reorganizations of Gender and Nationalism: Gender Bashing and Loliconized Japanese Society," *Mechademia*, no. 5.1 (2010): 328.

in which men are the lords of the manor, and the maids curtsy and respond to their every whim."[103] Girls are exploited at maid cafes, whereas they are empowered when they dress in Lolita and attend tea parties.

The dynamic between maids and Lolitas raises the idea of figures of identification versus figures of desire. By trying to be someone else, maid café employees are cosplaying a character that the male customer desires. The term cosplay comes from costume and play. Lolitas are not cosplaying, they are being their true selves. One could go as far as to say that, maids "serve" people, whereas Lolitas "are served."[104]

When conducting fieldwork in Japan, Kawamura Yuniya asked an anime fan why he frequented maid cafes. He responded that:

> "These days, girls are really independent, tough, and strong. It seems that they no longer need us men. But if you go to these cafes, the girls are cute, innocent, and sweet. When a guy meets a girl who looks vulnerable, it makes you want to protect her. It, in a way, satisfies our ego, and it is also a relief to know that these submissive girls still exist today."[105]

There is no information on maid café websites about the pay or age requirements of their employees. The interviewed male's quote illustrates why Lolita fashion is important to girls' cute culture. The faux Lolitas at the maid café exacerbate the sexualization of the *shōjo* and mute what girls are trying to express through cuteness.

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[103] See Somers, "Arisu in Harajuku," 215.
[104] Gagné, "Urban Princesses: Performance and 'Women's Language' in Japan's Gothic/Lolita Subculture," 141.
[105] See Kawamura, *Fashioning Japanese Subcultures*, 81.

2.21 Unnecessary Men

Some feminist thinkers believe that since both men and women are now able to be selective about their marriage partners, the number of people who want to marry but are unable to find partners has increased.[106] This gives women a form of will, causing men to find themselves unable to communicate with members of the opposite sex. When men are unable to express their desires openly they replace the 'woman' with a 'young girl.'[107] The young girl lacks a will and power of her own, allowing the ideology of the male gender to be projected onto them.

After the economic bubble burst, men found job stability a source of major concern and anxiety. As the economy collapsed men were unable to get a job, which traditionally provides them with the authority and financial power that they desire. Without employment men are left with a void, which they use girls to fill.[108] Men desire to dominate cute girls, by gaining a form of sadistic mastery over them.

Maid cafes, whose clientele is mostly male, are a brick-and-mortar form of debased girl culture. The customers in these establishments discredit what the Lolita subculture is trying to express. Rather than illustrating the importance of the identity girls have when dressing in Lolita style, men extinguish girls' identity by sexualizing it. At the heart of Lolita is the idea that girls are able to express themselves in a way that is safe, enjoyable and fantastic. By consuming cute products and cute fashion, girls add color to their external cocoons and transform life around them. This identity is part of a girl's culture, which is centered on cute commodities. Although

[106] Naitō, "Reorganizations of Gender and Nationalism: Gender Bashing and Loliconized Japanese Society," 328.
[107] Ibid., 328.
[108] Ibid., 329.

consumerism is a large component to this subculture, the market and commodities are shaped by girls themselves, thus reflecting the important purchasing power of this demographic.

Chapter 3: Female Narratives of Cuteness

3.1 Introduction

In "The Genealogy of *Hirahira*," Honda Masuko explains that girls' narratives are regarded as, "nothing more than meaningless entertainment for girls and are thus relegated to a hermetically sealed room out of the sight of respectable scholarship."[109] The scholarly neglect of material for girls is why I have chosen to include two contemporary narratives in this research that focus on cuteness. By venturing into the female literary imagination, the reader can discover how women express what life is like living as a female in contemporary Japan. Narrative forms allow the author to openly communicate aspects of life which they otherwise might not convey openly. In Chapter 1, I explored how cute objects provide a powerful means of expression for young women.[110] This chapter will analyze two separate works of fiction and how each author uses cute characters to narrate and shape their experience in contemporary Japan. One author expresses cuteness through a pathetic and cute girl, while the other uses a scary cute protagonist. Both authors express very different opinions of girlhood in contemporary Japan.

3.2 Uchida Shungiku

Uchida's girlhood memories are not filled with happiness like other Japanese women and her narratives reflect the trauma she experienced as a girl. During her sophomore year of high school she ran away from an abusive household and struggled while she made a name for herself. What is unique about Uchida is her usage of cuteness in her narratives to express the struggles

[109] Honda Masuko, "The Genealogy of Hirahira: Liminality and the Girl," in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (New York: Routledge, 1993), 25.
[110] See "1:1 Introduction."

she experienced as a girl. In *Revolutionary Suicide and other Desperate Measures*, Adrienne Carey Hurley quotes psychologist Dana Bryon Staubs's explanation that, "a novel can be used by a therapist and client to enter into a discussion of the protagonist's traumatic experiences, allowing the reader/patient to find ways to talk more freely about her own experiences."[111] Uchida uses her narratives to express her trauma, which in turns offers her readers an avenue to discuss abuse and related suffering. With fiction having titles such as *Fazaa Fakkaa* (father fucker), her works are not a light hearted read but similar to the girls who expresses emotions via cute objects, Uchida uses her cute protagonists as vehicles for her feelings.

Her first novel *Shingicu* (1984), was a manga collection of short stories that mixed sexuality with gag-humor. One of the couples in the collection was later featured in their own manga, *Minami-kun No Koibito* (1986).[112] In the later work the main character Chiyomi is drawn in an exaggerated cute manner. By focusing on the cuteness of Chiyomi, Uchida uses her as a vehicle to express a dark side of cuteness that reflects elements of Lolicon and the sexualization of the male gaze.[113] Using a hyper-cute version of Chiyomi is needed so that Uchida can emphasize the trauma Chiyomi suffers.

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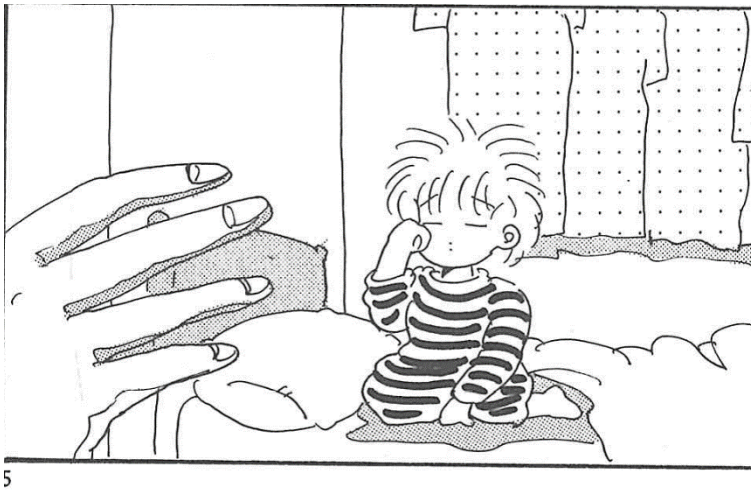
[111] Adrienne Carey Hurley, *Revolutionary Suicide and Other Desperate Measures: Narrative of Youth and Violence from Japan and the United States*, (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 50.
[112] Translates as Minami-kun's Sweetheart
[113] See "2:19 Lolicon."

3.3 The Pathetic and Cute Chiyomi



Chiyomi (image to the right) is a three inch tall girl who lives with her boyfriend, Minami-kun. It is important that Chiyomi lives with her boyfriend, rather than a female friend. Minami-kun acts as a vehicle for the male gaze. Due to her small stature, Chiyomi is stripped of all agency, and in her invalid state, she is dependent on Minami-kun. Her small size and lack of agency makes her pathetically cute to the reader. By placing a three inch girl in a normal size world, Uchida uses Chiyomi's weakness as a form of fatalism, rendering her completely defenseless to everything around her. Chiyomi is the cute object in this narrative and much like the cute objects discussed in Chapter 1, she invokes feelings of protection in the viewer.

Chiyomi's age is never provided and because of her undeveloped doll-like appearance, it is hard for the reader to attribute an age to her. Her lack of age and childish appearance exacerbates the "lolicon" image that the male gaze casts upon the *shōjo*. The male viewer is able to imagine that Chiyomi is any age, allowing them to project onto her and gain sadistic mastery over her. The sexualization of cuteness does occur in the narrative when Chiyomi and her boyfriend attempt to have intercourse. Much in the way that the maid café links sexualization and cuteness, Uchida uses this concept to illustrate how vulnerable the *shōjo* is to men who sexualize them. Chiyomi is unable to protect herself, so men are openly able to impose their ideology onto her.

3.4 Dollhouse Cocoon

To further the imagery of Chiyomi being doll-like, she has run away from home and lives with Minami-kun in a dollhouse that he keeps in his room. This dollhouse is a link to cute culture and provides a place where Chiyomi can live in her own world. Chiyomi's world of cuteness is different from the world previously discussed. Chiyomi's cute world wasn't created by her, but for her out of necessity. Although she is happy to live with Minami-kun, her dollhouse is a poor substitute to her real cocoon of *shōjo*. Chiyomi can no longer venture to the fantastic world of the girl through the cocoon she created in her room.[114] That cocoon has been punctured and is no longer a safe place for her. This breakdown of her cocoon has violently pushed her out of the world of the girl.

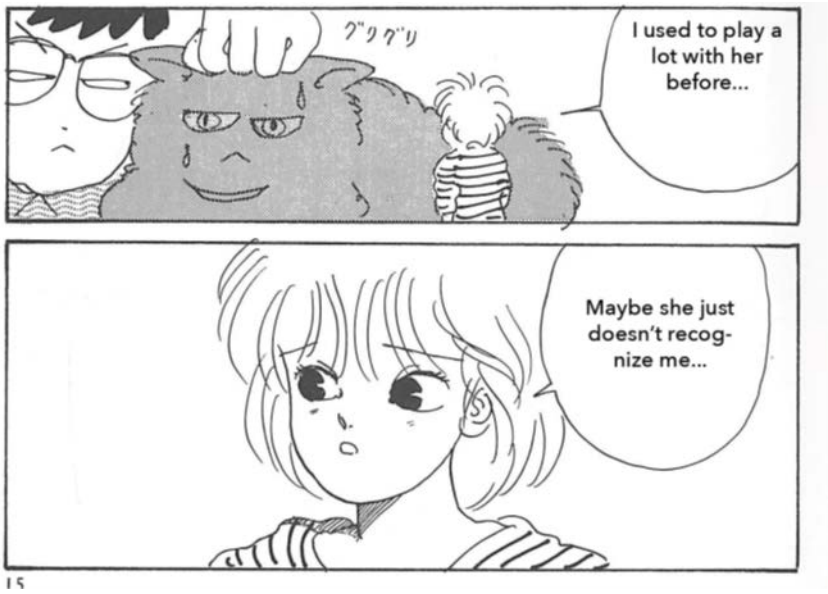
No one knows that Chiyomi has shrunk and now lives with Minami-kun. Being as small as she is, everything has become a threat to the vulnerable Chiyomi. To help Chiyomi survive in her miniature world, Minami-kun created a scaled-down world for Chiyomi, shrinking everyday necessities to accommodate her handicap. By being the producer of this world, he is able to build it based on his vision. This enables him to dress up his cute object in a manner which he so desires. Minami-kun is given complete mastery over Chiyomi but rather than exploit her, he chooses not to dominate her in the sadistic way that could occur between the cute object and the viewer. Minami-kun is revolting against the lolicon ideology and desires nothing more than to help and protect Chiyomi.

[114] See "1.1 Introduction," 2.

3.5 Paper Cup and Bottle Cap

In her invalid state, Chiyomi is not even able to use a toilet. Minami-kun constructs a crude toilet that uses the same structure as a training toilet. Chiyomi must use a paper cup and bottle cup with pieces of tissue paper that she tears off from a nearby roll. In a scene of the manga, Minami-kun leaves Chiyomi for a few minutes and without his aid she almost urinates on herself.[115] The usage of a make-shift training toilet and her lack of control of bodily functions portray Chiyomi as a child regressing back to infancy. It seems as though Uchida has taken cuteness to an extreme and rather than having the male gaze simply shrink Chiyomi, it is also stripping her of control of her body.

3.6 Trauma



Due to her change in physical appearance, Minami-kun's cat which was her friend, is now a lethal obstacle in her everyday life. After an almost fatal attack from the cat, Chiyomi is upset that the cat no longer

[115] See *Minami Kin No Koibito* (Seirinkogeisha, 1986), 15.

recognizers her. It is obvious to the reader that she is talking about her change in size, but there is also an underlying suggestion that there was another physical transformation that occurred causing her to shrink. Uchida framed this internal dialogue so that Chiyomi appears as if she's "adult size," and says, "Maybe she just doesn't recognize me…" But in the prior frame she is dwarfed by the cat, suggesting that her self-image is unstable. Repressing the trauma which caused her to shrink has resulted in Chiyomi losing a part of herself. Without this part of her, she no longer recognizes herself.

The reader, as well as Chiyomi, never learns what happened to her. It can be understood that Chiyomi blocked off her trauma as a coping mechanism which ate away at her, causing her to shrink. In the story, Minami-kun likes to put Chiyomi in his shirt pocket and carry her around with him, referencing her role as a cute object. Whenever the two are walking together, Chiyomi starts to cry a little bit whenever they get near her house.[116] Uchida never explains why Chiyomi has shrunk, nor does she explain why Chiyomi doesn't want to return home. In *Unclaimed, Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as, "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the presence to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena."[117]

Based on her reaction when she is near her home, one can conclude that Chiyomi's traumatic experience occurred at her house. The violent, sexual trauma in turn made her shrink to her current size. This is the identity altering transformation that occurred, shrinking her and stripping her of her agency and identity as an innocent *shōjo*. By becoming a cute child-like doll,

[116] Ibid., 9.
[117] See Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

Chiyomi no longer has sexual parts which can be exploited, causing further hurt to her. Chiyomi never returns to the site of her trauma. Her cocoon has been torn and the *shōjoscape* within her room is no longer available to her. Unable to return to the location of her trauma, she is doomed to stay within the cycle of traumatic violence.[118] Uchida uses cuteness in this narrative to convey the powerlessness Chiyomi experienced during the abuse. By making her small and cute, Chiyomi has been stripped of all her agency and is now completely dependent on Minami-kun while being vulnerable to everything in her world, much as she was vulnerable to abuse in her home.

3.7 The Nightmare

Uchida uses the cuteness of Chiyomi to expose the wound of trauma to the reader. The cries of trauma in this story are not openly exposed on the surface of the narrative but hidden in the unknown. As Caruth suggests, what haunts the victim of abuse is, "not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has yet been fully known."[119] A glimpse into Chiyomi's abuse occurs in a nightmare sequence in which Minami-kun is forced to be the dominating male gaze.

The nightmare sequence begins with a small Chiyomi floating against a black background. As she remains suspended against a black background, her oversize nightgown with a ribbon and lace collar falls around her tiny body a pathetic reminder of the *hirahira*. As with all cute objects, Chiyomi elicits a desire within Minami-kun of wanting to physically handle the

[118] Ibid., 11.
[119] Ibid., 6

cute item. He picks her up and cradles her as if she were a doll, while she cries out his name. Thinking Chiyomi is merely a doll, a confused Minami-kun starts to pull at her hair and extremities while she yells in pain. Like a cute doll, the powerless Chiyomi is motionless while her body is ripped apart.

In "Minstrelized Girls: Male Performers of Japan's Lolita Complex," Sharon Kinsella addresses the brutality depicted in moments such as the nightmare sequence in *Minami-kun No Koibito*. She believes that:

> "…in scenes of rape and violence, male producers and fans of Lolita complex material in particular may empathize with the female victim and heroine rather than the phallic aggressor, which is, moreover, often represented not as a man, but as a phallic object, machine or hideous demon. Nevertheless, while a male reader may identify with a girl insofar as he momentarily "sees" from her perspective, and may momentarily imagine what it must be like to be her by recognizing her facial expressions (of fear, agony, ecstasy), this may not necessarily lead to a consistent desire to be sympathetic toward her."[120]

I don't believe that men who are fans of Lolita material identify with girls by seeing through their perspective. They are voyeuristically watching violent acts occur, while monitoring the facial experiences of the victim. Unlike the boys' comics that depict women blushing during scenes of rape and violence, Uchida preserves the discomfort and alarm that the reader should experience. Being a female author, Uchida emphasizes the powerlessness and vulnerability of Chiyomi during her trauma. By including this graphic sequence, Uchida communicates the

[120] Sharon Kinsella, "Minstrelized Girls: Male Performers of Japan's Lolita Complex," *Japan Forum*, no. 18.1 (2006): 77.

disgust she has for the male gaze.

Uchida critiques the conventions of boys' comics using Chiyomi's trauma through a nightmare, so that Minami-kun can be used as a vehicle for the male gaze of the *otaku*. What occurred was not what Minami-kun desired but what the male gaze does to a girl when it objectifies and sexualizes them. Within Minami-kun, as with all men, there is the internal *otaku* which holds the ability to exploit women. The male gaze restricts the power of young women, stripping them of agency and limiting their ability. Minami-kun acted out the trauma Chiyomi experienced, as well as physically demonstrating what it feels like for a girl to be sexualized. Sianne Ngai in *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, argues that, "in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is often intended to excite the consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle."[121] I believe this concept is best applied when there is a viewer and object dynamic in which one is trying to dominate over the other. In order to conjure sadistic desires of mastery, there must be a power imbalance that the viewer wants to enforce.

3.8 Because She Was Small

Rather than allowing Chiyomi to confront her abuser and explain it within the narrative, Uchida chooses to never address the reason Chiyomi shrinks, forcing her to live forever as a three-inch girl. At the end of the story Chiyomi dies, never returning to her adult form and never experiencing the return of her agency. Sweet, loving and *kawaii*, Chiyomi was not able to

[121] See Sianna Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 65.

survive in a society which allows the male gaze to dominate and sexualize the *shōjo*. Her torn cocoon was an empty reminder of the *shōjohood* she could never return to. Once violated, she was unable to live and overcome the many obstacles that occur in the life of a trauma victim. The only option left for Uchida, was to allow Chiyomi to die rather than have her suffer the rest of her years as a small, empty, cocoon-less *shōjo*.

3.9 Yoshimoto Banana

It has been estimated that ninety percent of Yoshimoto Banana's readers are girls in the teens and early twenties.[122] Yoshimoto has been credited with creating a "banana world," full of play and girlhood. Her works are popular enough, that she can be considered a subculture phenomenon.[123] Words commonly associated with Yoshimoto's novels include, "cute," "bright," "fresh," "free," "naïve" and "innocent." Unlike Uchida's work, Yoshimoto reflects commonly acknowledged notions of cuteness and she typically writes for girls within the *shōjoscape*. Her style is heavily influenced by girls' comics, which allows for her work to be easily accessible for the *shōjo*.[124] With a literary scholar for a father, Yoshimoto's novels approach cuteness from a different perspective than the previous author. In the 1980s a "banana boom" occurred and Yoshimoto's cute *shōjo* novels became a world-renowned link to girlhood.

[122] Saitō Minako, "Yoshimoto Banana and Girl Culture," in *Woman Critiqued: translated essays on Japanese women's writing*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 193.
[123] Ibid., 179.
[124] Ibid., 179.

3.10 Izumo

A nostalgic hallmark of Yoshimoto's novels is the usage of Izumo, a place associated with an old Japan that is full of myths and legends. Many of the tales in the old Japanese text, *The Kojiki*, occur in Izumo. By setting *Goodbye Tsugumi* near Izumo, Yoshimoto is able to play with supernatural tropes in this work. Yoshimoto works the supernatural into the narrative subtly, blending the real world with the fantastic. The cute *shōjo*, Tsugumi, builds the cocoon of her girlhood within the world of the supernatural. Due to chronic illness, she is bound to her weak body but her mind freely roams in a fantasy world. Her cocoon acts as a bridge between the structured world of the everyday life and the fantastic, supernatural world. Frequent trips to 'another world' has stopped Tsugumi's growth, keeping her in an eternal state of *shōjohood*. Her scary cuteness parallels the old Japanese tales of terrifying and beautiful monsters that disguise themselves as maidens. This half of the chapter will look deeper at Tsugumi to analyze how her cuteness is being used by Yoshimoto. By linking her novels to Izumo, Yoshimoto gives her *shōjo* protagonists' agency that otherwise wouldn't be available to them.

3.11 Scary and Cute

By channeling her supernatural cocoon, Tsugumi has agency which otherwise would not be given to her. Her agency is counterbalanced by her illness, making her cute rather than aggressive and "loud." At moments she is able to summon the strength to throw objects and break glass doors, but it is usually at the cost of her physical well-being. After she channels too much energy, her body recedes to a catatonic state where she is bedridden for days. Her cousin and fellow *shōjo*, Maria, describes Tsugumi's physical appearance as:

> "Long black hair, translucent white skin, and large, very large eyes. Eyelids with thick lines of eyelashes that caste pale shadows whenever she let her gaze fall. Her arms and legs were long and slim, her veins seemed to lie just beneath the surface of her skin, and her body was small and tight- her physical appearance was so trim and gorgeous you could almost believe she was a doll fashioned that way from god."[125]

Her appearance makes her sound weak and fragile, elements that are commonly associated with cuteness, but behind this cute appearance, Tsugumi demands agency. Tsugumi is much like DOB, but rather than bare her fangs for all to see, she hides them behind large eyes, thick eyelashes, a slender powerless body and pale skin. Tsugumi's physical body masks the power she has, like a folk tale monster wearing the skin of a maiden.

3.12 Tsugumi the *Zashiki Warashi*

Tsugumi's physical appearance parallels the image of the *yokai* (Japanese folklore monster) known as the *zashiki warashi* (zashiki child). The *zashiki warashi* (image to the right) is a house spirit that takes the form of a small cute doll, usually depicted as a girl with long black hair and pale skin. The *zashiki warashi*'s habitat is the *zashiki*, a sitting room covered in tatami mats.[126] The *zashiki warashi* is known to play tricks on the family members of the house it inhabits, regularly leaving footprints around the house and creating phantom noises. The *zashiki warashi* will befriend a child in the house so it will have someone to interact with.[127]

[125] Yoshimoto Banana, *Goodbye Tsugumi*, trans. Michael Emmerich (New York: Grove Press, 2002), 6.
[126] Matthew Meyer, Zashiki Warashi, accessed April 2, 2016, http://www.yokai.com.

Similar to the *zaskihi warashi*, Tsugumi is depicted with long black hair and spends most of her time bedridden on her tatami floor. Due to Tsugumi's illness, she doesn't have many friends and the only people she spends time with are her cousin Maria and her older sister Yōko; the only other young people that live in the Yamamoto Inn with Tsugumi. Like the *zashiki warashi*, Tsugumi often plays tricks on her family members bringing mischief to the Inn.

It is common for the *zashiki warashi* to wear traditional Japanese clothing, such as the kimono. During the summer festival in *Goodbye Tsugumi*, Maria ties Tsugumi in a kimono and comments on the ghostly size of Tsugumi:

> "Tsugumi slipped into her kimono, and I picked up a red obi, wrapped it around her waist, and tied it. At times like this, I realized how thin she really is. It feels as if no matter how hard I pull, there will always be a little crevice of darkness beyond… I get the feeling that in a moment I'll find myself standing her with nothing left in my hand but the thin, stiff obi… A shiver runs along my spine."[128]

The ethereal appearance of Tsugumi alarms her cousin Maria but as the passage shows, she is aware that there is something different about Tsugumi. Being her closest friend Maria often mentions the unique connection that Tsugumi has with the supernatural. The other *shōjo*, Maria and Yōko are often amazed at how strong Tsugumi acts and they question how someone who is chronically sick could conjure such immense power and agency.

3.13 Within the Veranda

In one scene, Tsugumi taps into her supernatural ability and disappears from her room when she learns that Maria is bringing an unannounced guest to the Yamamoto Inn.

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[127] Ibid.
[128] Yoshimoto, *Goodbye Tsugumi*, 116.

Disappearing is a mischievous act that the *zashiki warashi* will employ in order to keep from being detected. Tsugumi's disappearance puzzles all of the residents at the Inn and her entire family searches the Inn as well as the neighborhood in an attempt to find out where Tsugumi could be. Her chronic illness worries her family since she always runs a fever when she reaches beyond her physically limitations.

Maria is the one who discovers Tsugumi's personal "rabbit hole," an opening between the floor of the veranda and the roof of the second story of the Inn. Tsugumi manipulated her size, shrinking down similar to that of Chiyomi, but unlike Chiyomi, Tsugumi uses her *shōjo* cocoon as a form of strength and is able to manipulate her size at will. After straining herself trying to hide from her family members, Tsugumi is overcome with a fever, the drawback of channeling into her cocoon. While looking after a bedridden Tsugumi, Maria comments about the fantastic feats Tsugumi performs, "Her spirit had the strength like the raging of a fire that could reach out into the depths of space, burning deeper than anyone's but her body kept it locked in extreme confinement."[129] Yoshimoto wants Tsugumi to be a strong *shōjo* but not one whose agency overpowers her cuteness. Limiting the physical ability of her supernatural power, Yoshimoto preserves the essence of cuteness by placing the power of a raging fire spirit, within the body of an ill *shōjo*.

3.14 Haunted Mailbox

Yoshimoto always makes Maria the witness to Tsugumi's supernatural abilities. As a *shōjo* Maria has stepped into Tsugumi's fantastic cocoon multiple times in the narrative. Maria

[129] Ibid., 95.

understands that Tsugumi walks the line that separates life and death allowing her to have a close link to the other world. In the early years of elementary school, Maria and Tsugumi would play a game that Tsugumi created called, "the haunted mailbox."[130] The mailbox was placed in a garden at the base of a mountain and contained a direct link to the spirit world. As time passed the game was discontinued until around the time the girls entered eighth grade and Maria's grandfather died. It is around this time that Tsugumi discovers a letter in the mailbox addressed to Maria from her dead grandfather.

In the end the letter is simply a mischievous jokes that Tsugumi plays on Maria, however, the timing of the incident is important. It was around the time that Maria's grandfather died but it also should be noted that eighth grade is a time of transition for the *shōjo*. Eighth grade is a time of bodily transformation for many girls including Tsugumi. I argue that it is the moment that her supernatural cocoon awakens. After the incident of, "the haunted mailbox," Tsugumi performs many supernatural feats. When Maria receives the letter from her grandfather, she truly believes that Tsugumi has traveled into the other world and returned. Upon finding the truth, Maria is upset at first but after confronting Tsugumi the two of them laugh about the situation and grow closer because of it. As a *shōjo* herself, Maria is able to witness the power of Tsugumi's cocoon and at times such as "the haunted mailbox" and the veranda episode she steps into Tsugumi's world. The two girls are able to grow closer, sharing their worlds with one another.

3.15 Rabbit Hole

As a girl, Maria is able to safely travel into Tsugumi's cocoon. However, when Tsugumi pulls a boy into her world it results in her near death and the boy physically suffering from it. At one point in the novel, Tsugumi digs a deep hole and traps a boy within it as punishment for

[130] Ibid., 15.

killing her boyfriend's dog. Unable to protect her beloved cute object, Tsugumi pushes her body beyond its physical limits and pulls a boy into her cocoon. At this moment, Tsugumi acts as a Miko (spiritual medium) guiding the boy down the rabbit hole and into her world of the fantastic. Miko use the *hirahira* of their kimono sleeves to call to the spirits, blurring the boundaries of the body and the other world. By pushing a boy down the "rabbit hole," Tsugumi cracks the barrier of the fantasy world and reality. This takes a toll on her fragile body and causes her to be hospitalized.

In *Minami-kun no Koibito*, Chiyomi's cocoon is torn, forcing her to never return to her *shōjo* world. By never being able to return to her world, Uchida decided to kill Chiyomi rather than have her suffer. Tsugumi's cocoon is compromised by her pushing a boy into her world but since the action is performed by her, she still holds all the power in her world. With agency and power intact, Tsugumi is able to return to her cocoon and Yoshimoto only merely entertains the idea of killing Tsugumi by having her hospitalized.

Uchida's narrative depicts a world in which a cute *shōjo* has fallen victim to the sexualization of the male gaze. Chiyomi's cuteness comes from her pathetic status and her tiny size. Although her small size appears cute to the reader it has stripped her of all her agency, making it impossible for her to live without the aid of her boyfriend Minami-kun. The violation she experiences by the male gaze causes her to lose her identity as the *shōjo*. Unable to cope with her trauma, Chiyomi is sacrificed to a society in which the *otaku* of "lolicon" holds the ability to dominate young girls. Not all *otaku* choose to do this, but as Minami-kun's nightmare reflects, they all contain this ability.

Yoshimoto's narrative features a chronically ill *shōjo* whose cocoon acts as a bridge to the world of the supernatural. Tsugumi's cuteness lies in her weak exterior, but it is one that masks her true power. Tsugumi is able to enforce agency by tapping into her cocoon and projecting herself beyond the limits of her physical body. The supernatural world acts as a playground where Tsugumi is free from the boundaries of the everyday life and can live in her fantastic *shōjoscape*.

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